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## Hallacy, Louis, II Oral History Interview: Tulip Time

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The Hope College Oral History Project for 1995  
The Joint Archives of Holland

Interview #18  
Mr. Louis Hallacy II  
The Oral History of Tulip Time

Conducted by:  
Jason Valere Upchurch  
17, July 1995

The Oral History of Tulip Time

Interview #18

- Interview w/ Louis Hallacy II @ The Holland Area Chamber of Commerce Office.
- A-587 Spring Lane / Holland, MI 49423
- July 17, 1995
- Interviewer: Jason Valere Upchurch

Begin Tape 12 : Side B

LH: Louis Hallacy the second, born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, [date removed], 1930.

JVU: What is the nature of your association with the Tulip Time festival?

LH: I've been involved with the festival since 1956, so just about a hair short of forty years. I've done everything from drive a car [in a parade] to scrub streets, to being the grand marshall; I've had a lt of jobs over the years. I've been involved with the festival board for pretty close to thirty years. I was on it originally as a private citizen, just a volunteer, and then I was elected to the Holland City Council in 1968. In '69, I became the president. The then mayor, Nelson Bosman--who is now deceased--had came down with . . . he had breathed in some fumes when he was burning poison ivy at his cottage out on Lake Michigan, and became quite ill from that--from inhaling that--so I took over as President [of City Council] and held that until 1973, when I was elected mayor of Holland, and then I was too busy to do both, so I gave up my seat on the board from '73 to 1980.

In 1981, I left my position in the private sector, and came to Holland Area Chamber of Commerce as its President and Chief Executive Officer, which automatically gave me a seat back on the Tulip Time board. So, I've been there since 1981, serving as treasurer and different capacities over that period. So, it turned out to be a lot longer than I anticipated, but it's one of

those festivals where you enjoy every minute of it.

JVU: Besides being involved by being on the board and that sort of thing, what areas of the festival, specifically, have you been involved with?

LH: Yeah, well, when you look at what one does for the festival, I guess back when the festival was smaller and everything's relevant--the crowds are bigger today than they used to be--we all had a lot of jobs; I know that I have held a position as chair of the Marshal Committee, the celebrities and local officials that are chosen as the Marshals for the day, I've done that for several years. I've worked in the area of the parades. I think I've done just a little bit of everything.

JVU: Could you describe for me, first off, any changes that you've seen in the festival over the years you've been involved?

LH: Well, I think we've seen a lot of changes. The festival used to be run strictly, and managed strictly on a volunteer basis. Over the years, they would hire a part-time manager that would work you know, kind of during the festival, wrap it up, then take a few months off. There were several, including myself, that worked hard to promote the development of full time administration of the festival.

We were the only major festival in the spring, in Michigan for many, many years. That has become very competitive now, so we do have full time administration, which started probably seven, eight, nine years ago. That I think is one major thing that has changed. We also were pretty--just by getting volunteer organization--records were not of major importance, and a lot of the records just weren't taken care of. They would disappear over the years. I think a lot of that has been brought back now.

We used to have a very short parade. The parade would start at Columbia and Eighth Street and go to River Avenue, turn South to City Hall and then disband as it turned left on Twelfth Street at Twelfth and Central. In the Bicentennial year of the United States, which was 1976, we extended that parade and it

started to go on Saturday--Saturday's parade used to go to Kollen Park, but the other two went to Twelfth and Central--but in '76 we took all three parades, and the first we went to Maple Avenue by the Civic Center, and then in the Bicentennial year, we extended the Saturday parade all the way to Holland High School, which it goes today; now the other two parades go all the way to Kollen Park, which is just a much easier way.

Some other innovations that we've done; I can remember the first year we decided to rent a couple trailers of chairs from Hertz Corporation, and that was the beginning of our bleachers, and following that success, Tulip Festival began to purchase the bleachers, and would then give them to the city, and the city would in turn use them in their ballparks in the summer time. In exchange for that, they would move them into place for the festival, and that operation continues today. I think probably one of the strongest changes that we have made over the years, is incorporating all the area schools into the Dutch dance program. It used to be strictly Holland High, then it extended to West Ottawa, then an invitation was extended to Holland Christian, and they joined, and now Hamilton and Zeeland, and I think it just makes it more of a bigger area festival, and to me, that's exciting because the young people that get in and get involved, many of those young ladies today--and even some fellows--are now back in alumni Dutch dance. People really love to come and see that.

Probably the thing that we've been able to hang on to and expand over the years has been the use of our volunteers. There's seven to eight thousand people doing something for this festival every year, whether it's a church group, or whether it's the festival board or whatever, and that to me is just . . . When I was mayor, we used to have different mayors in during the festival, and they still do that, but they do it at a different time and place, but these people just could not fathom the fact that we could muster so many volunteers that did it for nothing. I think the reputation of the town, the cleanliness, the city's

cooperation in expanding and developing the tulip lanes, you know, those are things that a lot of people look at it and just take for granted. But it doesn't, it takes a lot of cooperation and a lot of people's participation and working together to put something like this on, and give the city a reputation, and people back in 1929, when it first started--I mean it started as an idea--and over the few years it grew. During the war years, it kind of disappeared because everybody was busy with the War effort. After the war, it began to really pick up, and I think in the late sixties and seventies, the festival kind of matured; just kind of came into its own.

JVU: Do you think that Dutch pride . . . brought Tulip Time on, or do you think that Tulip Time has brought on a rise in Dutch pride in Holland, Michigan over the years?

LH: Oh, I definitely think the local people that live here . . . Oh I'd say when we moved here in 1956, the city was well into the high percentages of Dutch heritage or Dutch culture, and of course that has waned as the community has grown, which is bound to happen, but I think it's the pride that they have, and the way they keep their homes, their yards, that reflects on the community as a whole, and I think that the only reason the festival survives is because of that heritage.

I don't think that the festival brings any heritage to the community, I think the community brings itself.

JVU: Along those lines: In recent years, Holland has become more ethnically diverse. How have you seen that effecting the festival?

LH: I think it's just made it stronger. I think you know, you have to go through some trial and errors on these things, but if you look at the way they're working with the other festivals, those things are always slow, they don't happen over night. The festival didn't really blossom over night as I said earlier, and these other ethnic groups come in, and it takes a while to work them all in, but I think Holland has an openness about it, that was able to absorb the other ethnic cultures. There are a lot of

people, including the Chamber, that work very hard at ethnic diversity. It's coming, but all of these things, you've got to have a lot of patience.

JVU: How do you feel, not as somebody from the Chamber of Commerce, but personally, about the tourists that come into Holland?

LH: Well, Holland has always been a strong destination for tourism, and the reason for that is that back in the days before you and I were around, if you drive down along the Lake Michigan shore line, you'd see all these big, beautiful homes, and those were all summer homes from Grand Rapids and St. Louis and Chicago, and there were a lot of summer people that came. If you go back in the archives of the community, Virginia Park was a big destination for summer tourists. So, it isn't something that has just happened, it is something that has--again, like our festival--grown over the years.

We have the most, the largest, the most active State Park in the mid-west. They will draw between a million, seven and two million visitors a year. We, in this office, will see about twenty thousand visitors a year seeking information that come in through our door. Another thirty-five thousand will call, or we'll respond by mail and different things, so Holland has always been a strong destination, and it has all the amenities: got a great big pond out there to the west, it's got lakes, it's got good fishing, it's got golfing, it has a lot of shopping, and of course now it has what I think a goodly amount of lodging.

For many, many years we had a couple hundred and fifty rooms, and even during the festival or during the summer, we were booking people in Battle Creek and Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo, and Muskegon; we just couldn't take them all. Today I don't say that we can't take them all, but on most weekends during the summer from Thursday through Monday, you cannot get a room here. This past weekend was no different. In 1995 summer, I think you'll find the average occupancy will be well up--in the summer



months--in the eighties to ninety percentile.

JVU: What kind of experience do you think the tourists have that come here?

LH: Well, I most tourists that are out here with their families put up maybe with some things that they don't like, but I think overall, most people have a pretty good time. I just kind of relate that to my own travels. My wife and I have traveled extensively and most people are very nice to tourists. I mean you have some problems, but I think those are small. Overall, I think most tourists might gripe a little bit if the weather isn't right; they know that the locals can't control the weather, but overall, I think most of them have an excellent experience.

JVU: You mentioned that you were on the parade marshal committee, and that you have dealt with some of the celebrities that come into Holland. How does that program in more recent years, compare to the program that the Holland Furnace Company began in the thirties?

LH: Yeah, they used to bring in the stars from the West coast, and of course you have to remember they were a national company, they marketed their product all over the U.S., and I think that gave the festival a lot of visibility in its early years, which I think our hats are off top Holland Furnace and those people gave us a "one-up," you might call it.

We are, again, as time goes on, have become a little more sophisticated. Our procedure today in picking marshals or celebrities for the day--generally on the Wednesday Parade--our marshal is someone who is either very active either in the festival or in the community, and so we kind of try and keep that local. The Thursday parade is generally the Children's Parade where we have a lot of cooperation with the schools--Public Schools and Christian Schools--so we try and choose someone from the school system that has really contributed to the festival. Then, on Saturday, it's kind of an open door, but the last few years we've had some really distinguished local people that we felt should be honored appropriately, and so we've gone with



that.

In 1976, we had contracted--not contracted, but had a commitment from--Susan Ford, who is the President's daughter, and Ford was the sitting President at that time, and so she agreed to come. Following her, about two days before the festival, the President and his wife agreed to come, so we've had a little bit of everything. That's the only sitting President that has been in our parade. Of course, he was from West Michigan, and one of his claims to fame is that Ottawa County Farmers are the one that originally got him elected. But that was an exciting time for us, and having been the Mayor at that time, it was a great bit.

So, we've had a little bit . . . we've had people like Fred Meijer from Grand Rapids. We've had some locals--I'm just drawing a blank here. If I think of some more, I'll say it. We've had some really nice people that are well deserving; James Brooks, who was the son of the founder of Brooks Beverage, which is now Beverage America, was our Grand Marshal a couple years ago. Our own Jim DeGraaf this year, who was on our festival board. We honored him because he has done such a wonderful job for us. It's a matter of taking a look at not only what the name is, but what the person has done. If they've done something for the festival, that certainly gives them maybe a little higher point, but we think it's one also that people can have some recognition of who they are and what they are.

JVU: [Do you] have any specific memories from past Tulip Times that stand out as particularly memorable or special for any reason.

LH: Well, when you've been around the festival as long as I have, you come up with some really thoughtful experiences. I think one of the things that should be put into archival, is that how the festival really got started, and how it came about, and one of the things that really set the festival when it became a full fledged festival: There was an agreement in those days, and in those days, the Chamber was really the voice of the business community--it still is, but the business community is bigger--and

it was generally controlled by the merchants downtown, which was its own business area.

So, what stands yet today, is the festival board consists of three representatives from the Chamber and three from the city, and they in turn then appoint the expanded board, and those people--the six of those--are appointed for three year terms. All others appointed to the board, are one year terms, and the board is now done away with the ability to serve many, many years on the festival; you are now limited to six years. My job, as President of the festival and also the Park Superintendent, are permanent seats on the board that have been added over the last seven or eight years, primarily because of the full time commitment to furthering tourism.

They felt that it was a strong commitment too, so you really have eight board members plus the one year appointees, and that has come up to--I think they're pointing up to six or eight one year appointees, so you've got a board of fourteen to fifteen, sixteen people . . . that can serve six years each, and so it gives you some strong continuity and so many go off at one time.

Oh, I think the different memories . . . Probably the highlight of mine is the Presidential visit that we had, and I think some of the other things: all the different governors that have come here, that have really enjoyed and they look forward to as part of their tenure as Governor to participate in Tulip Festival. I don't know of any other parade that I've seen where you can take elected officials from the Governor to the Mayor and City Council, to our elected representatives in Washington and Lansing, that will turn around and put on costumes; most of them will be in a parade, but they'll sit in a car with their business suit on, and from the Governor on down to his wife and those attending, all get into Dutch costume, and I think that's pretty neat. I think those are the unique things.

The festival is emerging to looking for new attractions and new ideas, but I think there's a strong commitment by the

existing board to keep the status quo of the things that really count, [like] the association with the schools, the bands, the parades, the Dutch dance, those basic factors are not going to change. If they start to change, the face of the festival will change. I think there's a strong commitment to keeping it that way.

JVU: Speaking of trying to keep the face of the festival the same, what would you say Tulip Time has meant to the City of Holland since it began?

LH: Well, I think Tulip Time, to the city, has given it a recognition that most cities would give anything to have, and that meaning not only its reputation, but its--where ever you go, in most places, people know where Holland, Michigan is because of its tulip festival. It certainly adds to people relocating here, whether they're retirees or whether they're relocating their business, or whether they're going to take a vacation here. Those are all factors that come out of a major festival like that, that has such national recognition.

Fortunately, I think the way the festival has been run and the way it has been approached--it's an early season festival--it's been a big draw for senior citizens in later years with the advent of bus tours, etc . . . People like to come here. They get a good feel for the community, the feel good about it. So far, they feel safe. All those are all factors that make it very, very strong for the community. I don't know how much time you've spent here, but the minute something goes wrong in the community--not during the festival per say--but we're put on somewhat of a pedestal, and that's because of the image the festival and the community has created.

JVU: What has Tulip Time meant to you year after year, as a citizen of Holland, and also as somebody who's been very involved.

LH: Well, it gives me a lot of pride just to have been a part of it, and of course still being a part of it. I think it's good. It's been good for our children; they've all enjoyed it. Our

grandkids are now in the parades, and you know it's kind of neat. I just kind of call it warm fuzzies or whatever. I have always heard people say, "Well the festival is coming along; I'm getting out of town this weekend." That's okay, I think everybody's entitled to what they want. We enjoy seeing people enjoy themselves, and we, being a family, and we think again, it's good for our kids; it broadens their vision. I think any time you can help your children or grandchildren do that, then you've certainly accomplished something.

JVU: Throughout the years that Tulip Time has been running . . . how has the festival helped the city . . . financially? What has been the impact of Tulip Time.

LH: You can look at the economic impact in several different ways, and there's a lot of numbers that people throw around over the years, but whether we get three quarters of a million, or whether we get a million, or whether we get a half million, I really don't think the numbers are so important. But the economic impact is very significant.

Generally, our State Park is full during the festival, and you have to remember that we used to be a festival that opened on Wednesday and closed on Saturday, and now we're a ten day, eleven day festival. We've learned that the tulips generally bloom during the whole month of May, so it isn't a matter of just coming in on those four days and then leaving town. We now have an economic impact, and economic impact are people that spend money, are moving along and spending money during the whole month. We still have great crowds on Wednesday through Saturday, but we're beginning to draw them all month, and I think that there are some numbers around.

I don't know how much water they hold, but I would think the average tourist will spend sixty to a hundred dollars and that's even a senior, and that sixty to a hundred dollars per person as they travel--now that doesn't mean it's all going to get spent in Holland, but it might get spent on the way here. But out of that money comes getting the car ready, maybe they had

to buy a pair of shorts or shoes or whatever, so when they get down to the expendable income in the community where they're visiting, it can be anywhere from five dollars to twenty-five dollars. So, if you look at those numbers, and you say, if you just said we get a hundred thousand people, and they all spend twenty dollars, that's a lot of money.

So, it used to be that the restaurants got all the food business. Now you got concessions and you have to spread. We've got great attractions here. That's got to be their biggest shot, is during the festival. The economic impact, to me, is significant, but it's one of those things that's very, very difficult to get an actual bottom line on.

JVU: When would you say the turning point was in the festival, where maybe through advertising or whatever else, the festival changed on an economic level?

LH: Well, I go back to the days when I remember the founder of the, the manager of relations, or the founder of the Sentinel-- which is a hundred years old this year. He and several other people used to go up and down the streets and get contributions to run the festival. [They] had no such thing as a rainy day fund or anything like that, it was all done, "Let's raise whatever we need." If you didn't make it, if you got rained out and the people didn't come, they didn't spend, go to a couple of shows that they had. I think that the turning point really became when we got into full time management of the festival, really started doing some planning and programming and promotion and budgeting, and developed what I call an adequate reserve to operate the festivals so that you can do some different things and you're not always trying to operate from year to year. I think that was a turning point. That probably was in the mid-1980's. The festival in the early eighties had some tough years, but it was just in that there wasn't any plan, and it isn't a reflection on any one of the managers we had or anything, but you know, it's like anything else, if you get up in the morning, if you don't have any kind of idea what your going to do all day,



you aren't going to do anything. My feeling is that we have-- those that have been involved a long time, and those that have come along--have seen the need to run it like a business and that's what's being done now. It isn't out to make a lot of money, it's out to benefit that community, but money is a necessary part of the process to be able to go out and do these promotions and new ideas, and that's working very well.

JVU: Does the fact that Holland Tulip Time festival is a self-sufficient festival, does that free up a department like this-- The Chamber of Commerce--to plan other things for the period of time that the festival will be on?

LH: Well, the Chamber, for years, was really . . . the festival has always been somewhat separate, but for many years, the Chamber, the person who had my job, also was the director of the festival, and I think the last time that happened was probably in the mid-70's, just before we started promoting the philosophy of a full-time director. That took a while--probably took ten years longer.

We have created the Convention-Visitor's Bureau. Their principal mission is to make Holland as a destination. The festival and it's growth has seen the need--and which we were fully supportive of--of putting information booths around the city. They got them downtown, they got them in the parks, and before, the only place you could get that was either at the Civic Center, Tulip Time Office, or here, and we still get a lot of people, but we aren't the major, only spot in conjunction with the festival. They've got volunteers to man these booths. That's all part of that growth program, to serve the tourists, and you have to look at it that way. Our principal part of the festival, is that we are somewhat removed today, and that's fine but we're still very much part of the festival. We work very close, hand-in-hand . . . let me give you an example:

Years ago--not so many years ago--we used to take information that would come in the phone, and we'd write it down, and we'd keep those names, and Tulip Time would come in once or

twice a week and pick them up, and the mail out the brochures. Today, you call our office and we--and this is all because of the cooperative effort with the festival--we will respond and mail that brochure to you the day we receive your inquiry, and then we'll just charge the festival for the postage. We don't charge them any labor or anything, and we'll process from January through the festival, thousands of requests.

That to me is my point, in the cooperative effort that's gone on; those are the kinds of things that are happening. We do not have a lesser impact. They have a major role, but we're a big player behind the scenes.

JVU: Are there any specific people that you associate with Tulip Time, that you've dealt with through the years?

LH: Oh, gosh. Of course Nelson Bosman as I mentioned earlier was a very key part. He was of course Mayor here for ten years, and then he just worked with the festival. He took the sound system. He was the sound person, that was his job. Bill Wichers--the old timers like Bill Butler, those kind of guys. They were out begging on the streets for money for this thing as I mentioned. As you die, people forget those things. That's just the way the world is. I think it's wonderful that you're doing--I'm sure you've heard those names before, and people you've talked with. If you haven't, I'd be really surprised.

Bill Butler was a piece of work. He ran the paper. He was the kind that would go out and raise the money, and he was very much a part of the system, but the guys that you heard of were Wichers and Bosman. There's always a few of those behind the scenes. He wasn't so behind the scenes; he was very much involved. W.A. Butler. As I say, he was a piece of work. Not everybody agreed with how he handled things, because of his gruffness, [but] he was really a very nice person. I sure wouldn't want to leave any other impression.

I think in the current years--I don't know if my name's come up--but there's a lot of people, and again I really . . . to answer that question: I really think a lot of people. It's hard



for me to pinpoint other than early guys that I remember when I came here that really were doing a lot for the festival. Bill Vande Water, who used to have my job, was very much involved with the festival. But I really think the uniqueness of this festival goes back to those volunteers that I talked about, and to answer your question specifically, I think the success has been, is that people like myself and many others are in it for what's good for the community, and not in it for the personal recognition, and that's different from a lot of festivals. I mean, it's a perk in many communities.

When we went, as a community, in the Bicentennial year--'76 we went to the Tournament of Roses--the city of Holland promoting the festival, and you could say that the people that went out there on that float, were part of a perk. It wasn't, it was just people who volunteered to do it, and so that makes it kind of neat. A lot of people that were involved in the Bicentennial committee. People have not needed the recognition to be a volunteer in this community, and as long as we can keep it that way, we'll beat everyone at what they're doing. It's when you've got to start saying, "Well, I've got to have a pat on the back,"--and some people need pats on the back--but most people that work for this festival are ones that do it because they love it.

JVU: In the history of Tulip Time, you mentioned that it had been only recently that there was a lot of competition as far as Spring festivals go. You mentioned that until recently, there hadn't been any competition for the Tulip Time festival. How has that effect the festival? What was it like in the past, when there was no competition, as compared to now?

LH: Well, I think those things are cyclical. A few years ago there was a National Flower Show in Columbus, Ohio at the same time the festival was on, and when you're heavy into bus traffic, the bus people will give the people the option of doing different things, and maybe the cost is different, and so you may have some years like that. I think in 1973, that's an example where we had

the Energy Crisis. It hurt our car traffic. So, those things come and go. I think it's overall, that we do very well with bus tours, but again, that stuff goes up and down. When the interest rates were really high in the eighties, the seniors that had their money invested had a fair amount of money. All of a sudden, the interest rates went way down; they weren't spending money, so it affects your festival.

The festival is affected by the economy, and we saw that in the Energy Crisis, we saw that when the CD's weren't drawing the higher rates, and people just didn't have the money to spend. Overall, I think we're into strong marketing, both into bus tours, we tend the national conventions today, conferences like MTA and all the ones dealing with the heavy tourist traffic, and I think that is good for us, and it may help keep that at a more level pace. Attendance goes cyclical. It's based on the economy and the conditions. Overall, we're doing stronger marketing in West Michigan and the state of Michigan. It's amazing what that did to us in car traffic last year; it was tremendous. Sometimes you can start branching out, and you kind of look at your own market and forget about that. We haven't really forgotten about it, but I think we're really putting a strong emphasis on it.

JVU: What is your favorite of the Tulip Time festival?

LH: Oh, I like the parades. The parades and Dutch dancers. I think that again, that's the uniqueness, in our parades, they are really . . . they haven't lost their hometown flavor; they got a little bit of everything, from the baton twirler to the precision marching band, to floats that now--through an effort of the festival in the last few years--have tulips on them; live tulips. Those are things we didn't have years ago. But I think the parades and the Dutch dancing are the tops.

JVU: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

LH: I think the plans that are being put together, some of the things that have happened over the last few years, such as the poster--the advent of the poster in the early eighties--have

added, again, a quality impression of the festival, and produced a quality product. I think that's what the public likes about it.

-End of Interview-